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ABSTRACT

Community organization is a method of social intervention in which individuals, groups, and agencies plan actions which are intended to alleviate social problems. It is concerned with the education, development, and/or change of social institutions. This approach involves two processes: community planning and coordination. The general nature and historical role of organization in the Asian American community and group processes currently in effect in a specific Asian American community are examined. A review of three Asian American groups provides a sense of the psychological and social commonalities among them as described by various historians, writers, and scholars. One organization is described whose goal was to eliminate the cultural, social, economic, and educational barriers faced by Asian Americans, in addition to promoting the integrity and dignity of the Asian American experience. (KA)

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ORGANIZING THE ASIAN COMMUNITY: A CASE STUDY

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Community organization is a method of social intervention in which individuals, groups and agencies plan actions which are intended to alleviate social problems. It is concerned with the education, development, and/or change of social institutions. This approach involves two processes: community planning and coordination.

Planning is the conscious decision-making based on a set of values to allocate present and estimated resources available to meet certain goals. It is involved in identifying problem areas, exploring causes, and formulating solutions. Coordination is concerned with developing and organizing constituencies and devising strategies to bring action following the planning decisions. Each process can occur without the other, although planning without coordination is sterile and coordination without planning is aimless.

This paper describes the (1) general nature and historical role of organizations in the Asian American community; and (2) group processes currently in effect in a specific Asian American community.

CONCEPT OF COMMUNITY AND HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF ORGANIZATIONS:

Asian American communities are made up of a diverse and heterogeneous population. A sum total of social and cultural variables which lead to an all-inclusive definition of an Asian American community is somewhat difficult, if not, impossible to find. Thus, the concept of an Asian American community has been defined more in terms of a geographic and psychological concept limited to the interaction of individuals who share some degree of commonality from

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their Asian ancestry and from being members of a minority group (Sue, 1973).

Community organization among Asian Americans is not a new phenomenon. Early Chinese immigrants organized around their families or benevolent associations, Tongs, or business interests. They stayed close to their kinsmen, often living in the same quarters, operating shops and restaurants as a unit, and drawing upon their members for labor and financing. They lived in Chinatowns, "communities whose interrelated social elements combined to provide an atmosphere of organizational interdependency, assuring protection and security for its members" (Weiss, 1973). They formed traditional organizations to preserve their values, attitudes, sentiments, and themes reminiscent of Chinese society. With the passing of time and the demise of restrictive laws, participation in the mainstream American society increased. With this, the ability of and the need for traditional associations to solve the problems arising from involvement in American society decreased. Those of Chinese descent who now embraced their American heritage and pursue an American lifestyle, created their own organizations to allow themselves an outlet for their social and political ambitions as well as assure themselves of their Chinese identity. These more recent Chinese American organizations are primarily concerned with establishing and maintaining both an American and a Chinese identity.

Among the Japanese, the Issei (first-generation immigrant Japanese) formed cohesive social action groups which included, for example, farm cooperatives, collective bargaining groups, Buddhist and Japanese Methodist churches, and Japanese language schools, all of which helped fill the economic and cultural needs of a people newly arrived in a strange and often hostile land (Kitano, 1971). After World War II, the Japanese American Citizen's League played an

important role in providing the Nisei and Sansei (second and third generation Japanese Americans) groups with political, social and legal services.

Filipino immigration to the United States continued the Asian influx. However, their legal status differed in that they were neither aliens nor citizens but nationals - a title that withholds rights of citizenship to peoples of U.S. owned territories. After the curtailment of Japanese Immigration, labor contractors in Hawaii looked to the Philippines for their supply of cheap labor. The basis for emigration to the United States was thereby established and the Filipino population increased sharply. Those who made it to the mainland were restricted to the least desirable and lowest paying jobs in agriculture and in the salmon canneries.

Social interaction among the Filipinos in their new environment was based on their desire to find others who shared the home culture. Also, kinship systems are a strong influence in the Philippines. In the absence of this kinship system here, the Filipinos adopted a "corporate group" to provide the necessary social functions and interactions integral to their culture.

A network of reciprocal relationships was manageable in the early stages of the Filipino group. But as the group expanded, it became increasingly difficult to extend the sense of kinship to a growing variety of personalities. Interorganizational differences and conflicts were resolved by secession from the older groups and formation of new groups. Therefore, we find numerous organizations which define their own purpose and goals within the Filipino community.

This brief review of three Asian American groups gives us a sense of the psychological and social commonalities among them as described by various

historians, writers and scholars. Now let us examine a specific case of an Asian American community organizing not just within their respective culture groups but across these groups.

GROUP PROCESS IN EFFECT

The Asian American experience in the lower Puget Sound area of Washington, is similar to the Asian American experience reported earlier. In the outlying areas of Tacoma-Pierce County, many were engaged in small-scale farming, railroad construction, and in pariah (outcaste) occupations such as laundrymen, servants and cooks.

At the turn of the century, Tacoma launched an anti-Chinese campaign and expelled hundreds of Chinese from the city. Those that eventually drifted back to the area were young male sojourners. Due to exclusion until 1943, only a small percentage of the Chinese were able to bring over wives. Consequently, the Chinese American community in the area is small and consists of more recent immigrants.

Between 1901 and 1908, Japanese immigration to Washington reached its peak and many found their way to the lower Puget Sound area. Unlike their predecessors, the Japanese were able to achieve a favorable sex ratio before exclusion. The prevalence of families and the resultant increase of American born Japanese stabliized the population. With the onset of World War II, the Japanese community was incarcerated in concentration camps and many never came back to the area when they were released. The community never regained the proportion of the Japanese American population it had prior to World War II.

U.S. involvement in Asia has recently increased the military-related Asian

population, which include Filipinos, Koreans and Pacific Islanders serving in the armed forces as well as Asian spouses of U.S. servicemen (especially those of Japanese and Korean extraction). These military-related families have settled in communities proximate to Ft. Lewis, a major U.S. Army post. In 1965, immigration laws were changed influencing the influx of immigrants from Korea, the Pacific basin and the Philippines. Each of these populations has seen significant growth; for example in 1965 less than 50 versus over 12,000 in 1978. Lastly, many IndoChinese refugees have found a home in the lower Puget Sound area of Washington.

In the development, management and delivery of human services, the organization of an adequate social advocacy system for such a diverse community becomes a difficult goal to achieve. However, this was the goal of a number of Asian American professionals within Pierce County in the 1970's. Acting as the catalyst for change, the Tacoma Community House, a social service agency and part of the World Global Ministry, committed its resources to focusing on the problems of the Asian American community under the directorship of a Japanese minister. Over a two year period, Asian Americans in the county from social and health services, manpower development and other governmental agencies met and planned to meet the above mentioned goal. The group identified problem areas, explored causes for these problems and formulated solutions. Initial problem definition (efforts to describe adverse conditions requiring corrective action) focused on social and cultural barriers which perpetuated the "invisibleness" of the growing Asian American community, institutional racism access to social services, stereotyping of Asians, language barriers faced the immigrant population, isolation, depression and anxiety experienced by many of the Asian wives of servicemen, employment opportunities for all members of the community

and overall lack of awareness and sensitivity to the problems faced by a growing and diverse community. The plethora of problems and all the complexity of their causes make it hard to elaborate on all aspects of this planning process. Suffice to say, the magnitude of the operation convinced the group of the need for a more stable, structural organization. The Asian American Alliance was formed in April, 1973. Unlike previous student-initiated movements, the Asian American Alliance came into existence through the involvement of people in helping professions which makes it radically different from many Asian community intervention efforts.

The goal of the organization was to help eliminate the cultural, social, economic and educational barriers faced by Asian Americans, in addition to promoting the integrity and dignity of the Asian American experience. The process of coordination was directed towards advocacy for classes in English as a second language, employment programs to serve the needs of limited-English speaking Asian Americans, and establishing links to existing community services via outreach contacts. This outreach has been in the form of transportation, interpretation and translation for families that sought needed aid from existing agencies.

Community workshops were organized to increase the community's awareness of Asian needs. Through their involvement with the workshops, private and public agencies became more aware of the cultural and language handicaps of Asians in mainstream American society. Where services did not exist to meet the particular needs of the community, the Alliance assumed the responsibility to design and implement programs with two purposes in mind: to provide an immediate response to the problem of the community and (2) to demonstrate to

other agencies the need and feasibility of responding to that need. For example, group socialization activities have been organized to alleviate the problems of isolation among many Asian wives of U.S. servicemen. The Asian Friends Tea has become a dynamic program developing a support network for its participants. The agency has also organized the AAMHTF (Asian American Mental Health Task Force) with three mental health centers in the county, to explore ways in which mental health services can be made more responsive to the Asian American community. The process of planning and coordination is built into the system of the organization through its community-based program and planning component whereby various groups are involved in identifying problem areas and collectively seeking solutions.

In addition, the organization has now assumed responsibilities for being the catalyst of change in two neighboring counties. Through the use of VISTA volunteers, the agency has been able to expand its operation and establish a working relationship in those communities.

Efforts at community organization to solve the problems faced by the Asian Americans in this area have resulted in an increased sensitivity and responsiveness to the needs of this minority population.

However, this is just the beginning.